



God, Logic and Lies: Intra-Ḥanafī Polemics on Divine Omnipotence in Colonial India

Allah, Mantık ve Yalan: Koloniyal Hindistan'da İlahi Kudret Hakkında Hanefilik İçi Polemikler

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Article Information

Article Type

Research Article

Date Received

14 September 2023

Date Accepted

30 December 2023

Date Published

31 December 2023

Plagiarism

This article has been scanned with iThenticate software. No plagiarism detected.

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Cite As

“Chowdhury, Safaruk. “God, Logic and Lies: Intra-Ḥanafī Polemics on Divine Omnipotence in Colonial India”. *Kader* 20/3 (December 2023), 960-983. <https://doi.org/10.18317/kaderdergi.1360521>”

Abstract

This article is the first logical exploration of a major Islamic theological controversy regarding divine omnipotence (*qudra*) emerging in early 19th century northern India and persists today. The controversy involved two interconnected propositions. The first is known as ‘*imkān-e naẓīr*’, which is the proposition that God is able to create another identical Prophet Muḥammad. The second dubbed ‘*ikmān-e kidhb*’, is the possibility of God being able to lie or say untruths. The article will examine the arguments of two formidable scholars. The first is the one who detonated the controversy Shah Ismail Dihlawi (d. 1831) who argues for the possibility of God to actualise an identical Muḥammad and to lie and the second is his opponent and archnemesis Fazl-e Haqq Khayrabadi (d. 1861), who vehemently rejects both possibilities. The focus of the article is a detailed logical analysis of the structure and premises of the arguments as well as the core modal concepts assumed in the debate.

Keywords: Kalam, Logic, Divine omnipotence, *Imkān-e naẓīr*, *Ikman-e kidhb*, Northern India.

Öz

Bu makale, 19. yüzyılın başlarında Kuzey Hindistan’da ortaya çıkan ve günümüze kadar devam eden, ilahî kudret hakkında önemli bir kelâm ihtilafı ele alan ilk mantık araştırmasıdır. İhtilaf, birbiriyle bağlantılı iki tez içermektedir. İlk tez "imkān-i naẓīr" olarak bilinir ve bu, Allah’ın Hz. Muhammed’in aynısını yaratabilmesidir. İkinci tez ise "ikmān-i kizb" olarak adlandırılır ve Allah’ın yalan söyleme veya gerçeğe aykırı şeyler söyleme olasılığını hakkındadır. Makale, iki güçlü düşünürün argümanlarını inceleyecektir. İlk olarak tartışmayı başlatan Shah İsmail Dihlawi (ö. 1831), Allah’ın benzer bir Muhammed’i yaratabilme ve yalan söyleyebilme olasılığını savunan argümanlar sunar. İkinci olarak, karşıt görüşteki ve baş rakibi Fazl-e Haqq Khayrabadi (ö. 1861), her iki olasılığı da kesin bir şekilde reddeder. Makale, argümanların yapısını ve öncüllerinin yanı sıra tartışmada deruhte edilen temel modal kavramların ayrıntılı mantıksal analizine odaklanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kelâm, Mantık, ilahî kudret, *Imkān-ı naẓīr*, *ikmān-ı kizb*, Kuzey Hindistan.

Introduction

The divine attribute of God’s omnipotence or ‘power’ (*qudra*) figured prominently in Muslim theological discussions and reflection within the first few centuries of Islam.¹ Its definition, scope and its relation to other attributes like ‘will’ (*irāda*) and ‘justice’ (*‘adl*) brought about different perspectives from various theological persuasions and groups that emerged within those centuries like the Mu‘tazila, Ibāḍīs, Shī‘a, Ash‘arīs, Māturīdīs and traditionalists.² The intricacies

¹ For a short outline of divine power in passages of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth see Martin Nguyen, “The Contours of God’s Power: An Introduction to Passages from the Qur’ān and Hadīth” in *Power: Divine and Human. Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, ed. Lucinder Mosher and David Marshall (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 30–41. I use the English omnipotence and power interchangeably in the article

² On discussions about divine power, see for example Ibn Ḥazm’s extensive survey in *al-Faṣl fi-l-milal wa-l-ahwā’ wa-l-niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1996), 2/20–33 under the topic of miracles (*mu‘jizāt*); al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fi abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-‘adl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2011), volume 6 as it relates to issues such as human free will, goodness and evil; al-Ghazālī’s philosophical critique in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and Ibn Rushd’s counter-refutations in *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1954), 323–333, sec. 528–542. Cf. as well al-Ghazālī’s theological account of the attribute of power in *al-Iqtisād fi-l-‘itiqād* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2008), pp. 149–164. For discussions on divine power and both their logical and theological implications related to optimism, see al-Biqā‘ī’s *Tahdīm al-arkān min laysa fi-l-imkān abda‘ min mā kān* (Amman: Dār al-Fatḥ, 2019). Finally, refer to al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-mawāqif* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 8/57–74.

of these discussions on divine power resurfaced as a result of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) optimism captured in his statement "there is nothing in possibility more wonderful than the actual" (*laysa fi-l-imkān abda' mim mā kāna*), that subsequently generated a dividing line between those who on the one hand rejected outright the statement and its implications and those on the other who vindicated what they saw was a penetrative insight about reality and the goodness of God and His providence. These discussions and the ensuing polemics around the scope and nature of God's power took on a particular intensity among notable Muslim scholars within the Mamlūk period and beyond and is thoroughly documented by Eric L. Ormsby in his highly original study *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*.³

However, a second controversy occurred more eastwards several centuries later to al-Ghazālī in 19th century Colonial India among the Muslim scholarly figures, one that continued well into the post-partition period of Indian independence in 1947.⁴ In this iteration of the omnipotence attribute, debates fixated on two central propositions. The first proposition is whether it is possible for God to create an identical Prophet Muḥammad, known as the 'possibility of creating an equal Prophet Muḥammad' (*imkān al-naẓīr*) and the second is whether it is 'possible for God to lie' (*imkān al-kidhb*). The truth of each proposition assumes specific ideas about the nature and scope of divine power. The inflamed theological and philosophical exchanges around both propositions later led to more pronounced discussions over the second one, that already had antecedent discussions recorded within classical and post-classical *kalām* works.⁵ The earliest noted written exchange in Northern India took place between two formidable intellectuals. The first was an Indian reformist scholar and fighter Shah Muhammad Ismail Dihlawi (d. 1831), the grandson of the highly esteemed intellectual 'reviver' (*mujaddid*) of India Shah Waliullah Dihlawi (d. 1762).⁶ The second was a jurist, philosopher, theologian, 'rationalist' (*ma'qūlī*), poet and political dissident of the British colonial administration Fazl-e Haqq Khayrabadi (d. 1861).⁷ He vociferously

³ Eric L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought. The Dispute over Al-Ghazālī's "Best of all Possible Worlds"* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984). Specifically relevant for this paper is chapter 3 of Ormsby's book.

⁴ Borrowing from Asad Q. Ahmed's characterisation, I do not use 'Indian' in any sense implying nation-state boundaries; rather, "I use it interchangeably for South Asia and as a shorthand for those domains that were under direct or indirect Mughal suzerainty at some point in the history of the region. This, too, should not be interpreted as a connotative concession to contested categories, but only as a way to set up a vague regional referent". Ahmed, *Palimpsests of Themselves. Logic and Commentary in Postclassical Muslim South Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press).

⁵ This position of the possibility of God lying is attributed to the Mu'tazila, who are considered by the Sunni theological schools as a broadly heterodox group. See Gibril F. Haddad, *The Maturidi School: From Abu Hanifa to al-Kawthari* (Oldham: Beacon Books, 2021), 14-17. See as well Khaled El-Rouayheb's discussion in "Must God Tell the Truth? A Problem in Ash'arī Theology", *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honour of Professor Patricia Crone*, ed. Asad Q. Ahmed et al (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 411-429.

⁶ On a partisan account of Muhammad Ismail Dihlawi's life, works, doctrines and responses to accusations of heterodoxy levelled against him, refer to Khalid Mahmud, *Shah Ismail Muhaddith Dihlawi. Shahid Balakut* (Lahore: Maktabat Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1982). For a broad overview of Dihlawi's life and impact, see SherAli Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 52-84.

⁷ On Khayrabadi's life and impact, see Iqbal Husain, "Fazle Haq of Khairabad – A Scholarly Rebel of 1857", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 48 (1987), 355-365 and Jamal Malik, "Letters, prison sketches and autobiographical literature: The case of Fadl-e Haqq Khairabadi in the Andaman Penal Colony". *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 43/1 (2006), 77-100.

opposed Ismail Dihlawi and was in one arguable sense the latter's archnemesis. The present article will be a logical examination of the arguments for and against both propositions according to both these intellectuals and the broad structure will be as follows. Section 1 of the article contains an outline of the problematic statements found in Ismail Dihlawi's works that first detonated the controversy over God's ability to create an equal Muḥammad (*imkān-e naẓīr*) and indeed the possibility of God lying (*imkān-e kidhb*) as well as the supporting arguments for it. It will also include, where relevant, Khayrabadi's rebuttal of these arguments. Section 2 gives full explication of Khayrabadi's position of 'the impossibility of an identical Prophet Muḥammad' (*imtināʿ-e naẓīr*) and the impossibility of God lying from his own works with a presentation of his supporting arguments. Section 3 is the conclusion and offers my own remarks about divine 'wisdom' (*ḥikma*) and 'power' (*qudra*) in light of the logical analysis given of each theological position from sections 1 and 2. The points I raise in the conclusion focus on an undeveloped aspect of Ismail Dihlawi's arguments within the entire controversy and that is divine omnipotence being constrained by wisdom. I assess some implications of this wisdom constraint.

Although this theological controversy in India as highlighted began in the early decades of the 19th century, it was appropriated by various outstanding Indian Islamic scholars who continued the polemics through a hardened factionalism and in a more intensified and detailed form. This factionalism was represented mainly by senior scholarly figures of Dār al-ʿUlum Deoband, referred to as 'Deobandis' who consciously aligned with Ismail Dihlawi's position and Ahmad Reza Khan (d. 1921) and his followers, known as 'Barelwis', and who in many ways are the intellectual heirs of Khayrabadi, maintaining the latter's position.⁸ In some references, the two factions were sometimes referred to as the 'Ismailis' and the 'Khayrabadis'.⁹ Both propositions *imkān-e naẓīr* and *imkān-e kidhb* are still debated nearly two centuries later within not only the original towns from where the controversy began in India but within the various Deobandi and Barelwi diaspora in the west, notably the United Kingdom.¹⁰ Although this sectarian drive is arguably a major factor in

⁸ Ahmad Reza Khan for example wrote half a dozen independent tracts on the intrinsic impossibility of God being able to lie against not only Khayrabadi's main interlocuter Ismail Dihlawi but against the 'Elders' (*buzurgān, akābir*) of the newly established Islamic seminary of Deoband, who embraced Ismail Dihlawi's work in broadly positive terms and defended the nature of his claims as being orthodox. See Khan's *Subḥān-e ṣubbūḥ* (1890), *Dāmān-e bāgh-e subḥān al-ṣubbūḥ* (1890) and *al-Qamʿ al-mubīn* (1911) that contain extensive discussion on this controversy, much of which has strong antecedents in Khayrabadi's own responses analysed in this article. On the official Deobandi doctrinal position on the issue of both the 'possibility of God lying' (*imkān-e kidhb*) and the 'actual occurrence of a lie from God' (*wuqūʿ-e kidhb*), refer to Khalil Ahmed Saharanpuri, *al-Muḥannad ʿalā al-mufannad*, ed. Muhammad Ibn Adam al-Kawthari (Amman: Dār al-Fatḥ, 2004), 84-96. Incidentally, this topic is the given the most extensive response in *al-Muḥannad*. For online English-speaking Deobandi partisan polemics around the topic of *imkān-e kidhb*, see <https://barelwism.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 13 December 2022.

⁹ This is how it was referred to by Mehr Ali Shah (d. 1937), one of the pre-eminent intellectual and spiritual scholars of India during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, known famously for his polemics with Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadiyan; see his *Fatāwā-e mehriyya* (Lahore: Maktaba-e Mehriyya, 2010), 11. On specifically the historiography of this polemic between the 'Ismailis' and 'khayrabadis', refer to Mohammad Waqas Sajjad, "Writing History in Deobandi-Barelvi Polemics: Conflicting Views of Shah Ismail and Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 46/3 (2023), 612-627.

¹⁰ On an account of the origins of the Deobandi-Barelwi conflict and challenges around its academic representation, see Mohammad Waqas Sajjad, *For the Love of the Prophet: Deobandi-Barelvi Polemics and the Ulama in Pakistan* (California: Graduate Theological Union, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2018), 23-303.

why the controversy persists within public and social media polemics, it is the philosophical merits of the controversy that has been entirely overlooked within the academic literature on Islamic theology and philosophy. At the time of writing this article, I have been unable to locate any catalogued written thesis, or formally published article or book in a south Asian or European language containing either a preliminary or thorough *logical* assessment of the controversy.¹¹ This is partly due to a larger regrettable neglect of South Asian contributions to the transmission, preservation and augmentation of classical Muslim theology and philosophy, reflected in a broader European scholarly disinterest in the region. Another reason is the inaccessibility of primary logical texts from Indian soil for logicians or historians of logic. A notable exception is the recent release of a monograph by Asad Q. Ahmed called *Palimpsests of Themselves*, which is a translation and thorough examination of *Sullam al-ʿulūm* (“The Ladder of the Sciences”), one of the most advanced logical texts in the Indian Islamic Nizāmī curriculum written by Muhibullah al-Bihari (d. 1119/1707).¹² Hence, the present article is an attempt to introduce historians, philosophers as well as analytic theologians to the way logic and familiar logical ideas were applied by Indian scholars to matters of scriptural hermeneutics and major doctrines in often novel ways that predate what contemporary Muslim theologian and philosophers are doing.

It is necessary to mention something on approach and then on conventions used in this article. Firstly, on the approach taken in the article. I adopt logical analysis as the guiding method relying on the formal machinery of modern first-order logic. This means examining the arguments and then explicating the reasoning behind them. Inevitably, there will be limitations in such an approach in that I am utilising a logic with its symbolic apparatus that is entirely different from the largely categorical logic that was used by and familiar to Dihlawi and Khayrabadi. Moreover, in my analysis of the arguments, there is a degree of formal reconstruction and supplementation that involve making explicit suppressed premises or hidden assumptions, rephrasing source text syntax and linguistic expression, translating natural language (Urdu and Farsi in this case) into a semi-formal language and symbolisation. Hence, there is an inescapable element of logical ‘intrusion’ by me as an expositor of the issues and arguments. Nevertheless, the approach will aid with not only methodically tracing the steps in the reasoning underpinning the various arguments and to better examine the validity but to appreciate their originality and sophistication as well.

Secondly, regarding conventions, on diacritics, I follow the Arabic and Farsi transliteration system from the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) with the following additions for Urdu letters: ط/ṭ, ڈ/ḍ, ژ/ṛ, ض/z, و/v, ū, o, au, ے/y, e, ay and ن/n. For the *izāfat* (syntactical construct of two nouns denoting possession) I use -e. Often, I omit ة in the transliteration, e.g., یک روزہ is written as *Yak Roza* and not *Yak Rozah* but retain it for names, e.g., Muhibullah and not Muhibulla. In

¹¹ Tareen in *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity* excellently presents a descriptive analysis of this controversy but it is not a philosophical or logical one. Similarly, just released is a monograph by the Jordanian kalām theologian Saʿīd Fūda entitled *Baḥṭh fī masʿalat nisbat al-kidhb ilā Allāh* (Amman: Dār al-Aṣṣayn, 2023), 213–257 that devotes over forty pages to specifically the possibility of God lying among the Deobandi and Bareilwi groups; but again, it is not a logical analysis but a survey of the various arguments with their textual and rational evidences.

¹² Ahmed, *Palimpsests of Themselves*. Remedial projects for the inaccessibility of logical works from the postclassical South Asian tradition is yet to earnestly begin.

addition, I have not transliterated any South Asian names and have also omitted the definite article before any attributions (*nisbat*), e.g., Saharanpuri instead of al-Sahāranpūrī, although I do retain it for all pre-modern Arabic and Persian authors, e.g., al-Ghazālī and not Ghazali. Furthermore, I follow all standard logical notations and provide all symbolisation keys where necessary in the footnotes in order to avoid clutter in the main body of the article. A table of all logical symbols can be found at the end. Finally, unless stated and acknowledged, all translations are mine.

1. The Problem Stated and Supported

In a complex construction of British colonial presence in 19th century India that negotiated hegemony with limited internal native autonomy, emergence of reactionary Islamic theological and reformist movements, contestations of different Muslim theological discourses and devotional sensibilities, variable religious allegiances, and competing visions of Muslim modalities of being and order based on divergent political theologies, there occurred fierce intra-Ḥanafī polemics around rarified matters of philosophical theology. Albeit highly important, this section will not include the historical development of how this complexity configured itself nor how it was conducive for incubating specific polemics because this paper is a logical examination of arguments and not an investigation into intellectual history. Others have carefully researched and provided the relevant historical surveys of the religious, social, cultural, political, and economic factors throughout the period.¹³ The focus of this section is stating the core contentions that led to the theological controversy around the topic of divine omnipotence that continued intensely after the demise of Ismail Dihlawi and Khayrabadi, the main thinkers under consideration in the present article. This theological controversy was caused by a reassertion of an unrestricted notion of divine omnipotence by Ismail Dihlawi that is situated in, arguably, a larger reclamation of ‘divine sovereignty’.¹⁴ Ismail Dihlawi’s claims were met with scorn and derision by Khayrabadi and according to Tareen, the chronology of the written polemical exchange between both scholars went as follows: Dihlawi composed *Taqwiyat-e imān* around 1820s and in the same year elicited a short response of a few pages from Khayrabadi called *Taqrīr-e itirāzāt bar Taqwiyat-e imān* (‘A Statement of Objections against *Taqwiyat-e imān*’) denying the possibility of creating a second Prophet Muḥammad. This was followed by Dihlawi’s philosophical rebuttal in the form of the pamphlet *Yak roza* around 1825. Subsequent to this, in 1826, Khayrabadi wrote his larger and more comprehensive rebuttal of Ismail’s ideas in Farsi entitled *Tahqīq-e fatwā fi ibtāl-e tuḡhwā* (‘The True Verdict on Destroying Falsehood’). The arguments in this work will be the primary source from which I will reconstruct and analyse Khayrabadi’s arguments.¹⁵

¹³ See the historical accounts by Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 16-86; Usha Sanyal, *Ahmad Riza Khan Bareilwi: In the Path of the Prophet* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 1-49 and Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity*.

¹⁴ I take this sense of divine sovereignty broadly characterised by Tareen that involves upholding God’s exclusive prerogative over not only the legal order and moral realm but His absolute power and control over the causal structures of the world. No creature, however great, can be characterised in sharing such prerogative, power and control nor infringe on or curtail them. *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity*, 85-103.

¹⁵ Khayrabadi also wrote a detailed ‘theological refutation’ (*tardīd*) in Farsi to another scholar and student of Ismail Dihlawi by the name of Haidar Ali Tonki of Rampur entitled *Imtinā-e nazīr* (‘The Impossibility of Creating an Identical

There are two of Dihlawi's comments that reignited the controversy over divine omnipotence: one was on God's power to create innumerable Prophet Muḥammads and another on God's power to produce an untrue or false statement (i.e., a lie); both comments will now be reproduced and explained.

Comment 1: This is from Ismail Dihlawi's text on divine 'oneness' or 'unity' (*tawḥīd*), and 'transcendence' (*tanzīh*) called *Taqwiyat-e imān* ('Fortifying the Faith'), which was written in vernacular Urdu and explicitly aims to expunge accretions of unislamic ideas, beliefs and practices that encroach on divine sovereignty. Thus, it is a text underpinning Dihlawi's "reformist programmatic for ending heretical innovation in the practice of popular Islam in South Asia".¹⁶ Dihlawi's controversial comment (underlined in the translation) is as follows:

*Attaining God's (Most mighty and exalted) proximity via the intercession of someone enjoying a high-ranking status is impossible. Any person who takes such kind of intercessor other than God, is definitely a polytheist (mushrik) and undoubtedly an ignorant person because he has not truly understood the meaning of 'deity' (ilāh) and has not comprehended the proper status of the King of kings whatsoever. The status of this King of kings (God Most High) is such that if He so wishes, then by merely uttering the word 'Be!' (kun), He can in an instance, bring into existence millions of Prophets, saints, jinn, angels, Jibrā'il and Muhammad (God bless him and grant him peace). In addition, in one breath, He can annihilate every single thing in the entire universe and create a different world altogether. Everything comes into existence merely by His Will and He does not require matter and substance to create things. If all human beings and jinn from the time of Ādam (upon him be peace) until the Day of Judgment, become like Jibrā'il and the Prophets, it will not add anything to the greatness of God's kingdom (salṭanat). Conversely, if all of them turn into devils and antichrists, there will be no reduction in His authority. In all cases, He will still continue to be the Greatest of all and the King of all kings. No one can either harm or benefit Him.*¹⁷

The context of this passage is Dihlawi's discussion on the issue of 'intercession' (*shafā'at*), especially the category of intercession known as 'intercession from regard' (*shafā'at-e vajāhat*), where God must pardon an individual on account of an intervention of a person of high spiritual rank or piety. "For example, a criminal is placed before the king. The Vizier intercedes. The king, having regard to the rank of the Vizier, pardons the offender."¹⁸ For Dihlawi, God was under no obligation to pardon anyone on account of a petition from a pious person – even that of God's

Muḥammad'). This is often mistakenly referenced as a rebuttal of Ismail Dihlawi although it does include references to him and his ideas and arguments.

¹⁶ Marcia K. Hermansen, *The Conclusive Argument from God. Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi's Ḥujjat Allāh al-Bāligha* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), xxxiv. An English translation of *Taqwiyat-e imān* appeared as early as 1852 by Mir Shahamat Ali published as "Translation of the Takwiyat-ul-Imān, preceded by a notice of the author, Maulavi Isma'il Hajji", *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 13 (1852), 310-372.

¹⁷ Dihlawi, *Taqwiyat-e imān* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Da'wa wa-l-Taw'iyat al-Jāliyyāt, n.d), 86:

اللہ عزوجل کے حضور شفاعت و حاجت قطعاً طور پر ناممکن ہے جو شخص کسی غیر اللہ کو اس قسم کا شفع مان لے وہ قطعاً مشرک ہے اور بڑا جاہل ہے اس نے اللہ کے معنی سمجھے نہیں اور شہنشاہ کی قدر و منزلت پہچانی ہی نہیں۔ اس شہنشاہ (باری تعالیٰ) کی تو یہ شان ہے کہ اگر چاہے تو اللہ لفظ کن سے کروڑوں نبی، ولی، جن، فرشتے، جبرائیل اور محمد صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کے برابر ایک آن میں پیدا کر دے اور ایک دم عرش سے فرش تک ساری کائنات کو زیر و زبر کر دے اور دوسرا عالم پیدا کر دے۔ اس کے تو ارادے ہی سے ہر چیز پیدا ہو جاتی ہے اسے مادے کی اور سامان کی حاجت نہیں۔ اگر آدم سے لے کر قیامت تک کے تمام انسان اور جن جبرائیل و میکائیل جیسے ہو جائیں تو ان کی وجہ سے اللہ تعالیٰ کی سلطنت میں کچھ بھی رونق نہ برے گی اور اگر سب شیطان و دجال بن جائیں تو اس کی حکومت کی کچھ رونق بھی نہ گھٹے گی وہ ہر حال میں تمام بڑوں کا بڑا اور تمام بادشاہوں کا بادشاہ ہے نہ کوئی اس کا کچھ بگاڑ سکے اور نہ بنا سکے۔

¹⁸ Edward Sell, *The Faith of Islam* (London, Trübner & Co., and Madras, Addison & Co. 1880), 158.

most beloved, the Prophet Muḥammad himself. If God were so obligated, then the Prophet (or any pious individual granted intercessory prerogatives) would exert a power over God to act, which is tantamount to ‘idolatry’ (*shirk*).¹⁹ Dihlawi here in this passage that later incensed Khayrabadi due to its poor choice of words and breach of etiquette against the revered rank of the Prophet, claimed quite literally that God could create a ‘million’ (*kororōn*) Prophet Muḥammads if He so wished because of His absolute power. For Khayrabadi, this statement is specifically problematic because it implies that God can create another identical ‘essence’ (*māhiyyat*) of the Prophet Muḥammad “in addition to all his unique and perfect properties” (*tamām awṣāf-e kāmila*), two of which are that He is the seal of all the Prophets and that he alone is granted the most expansive and magnanimous power of intercession in the hereafter. For Khayrabadi, this is what *imkān-e naẓīr* means – not God’s creation of a mere likeness of the Prophet Muḥammad but an absolute identical creation.²⁰ The underlying logic of Dihlawi’s passage will be explained below after comment 2.

Comment 2: This is from Ismail Dihlawi’s highly interesting but short pamphlet *Yak roza* (‘One Day’), written within a day (hence the title) in a central mosque courtyard after prayers as a direct response to an unnamed detractor²¹ regarding modalities of divine power and the perceived problematic phraseology regarding the possible identical creation of the Prophet Muḥammad in *Taqwiyat-e imān*. Dihlawi states in one place:

He says: ‘it is impossible [for God to lie] because it is an imperfection and all imperfections are impossible for Him’. I say: if by impossible (muḥāl) is meant intrinsic impossibility, in that it is not included within divine power, then we do not concede that the aforementioned [sense of] lie (kidhb) is impossible in that meaning given. A statement that does not accord with reality being put together and being delivered to angels or prophets is not [per se] excluded from divine power. Otherwise, it would entail that human capacity is greater than divine capacity, given that putting together a statement that does not accord with reality and delivering it to addressees is within the capacity of most individuals from humankind. The aforementioned lie is opposed to His wisdom (ḥikmat), and is thus extrinsically impossible. Therefore, the absence of lying is one of the many perfections of God (Glory be to Him!).²²

¹⁹ Dihlawi, *Taqwiyat-e imān* (Maunath Bhanjan, U.P.: Maktaba-e Na’imiyya, n.d.), 43. For a discussion on the topic of intercession within Dihlawi’s thought and Khayrabadi’s rebuttal, refer to the latter’s *Imtinā’-e nāẓīr li-ḥaḍrat khātim al-nabīyyīn* (Bareilly: Imam Ahmed Reza Khan Academy, 2012), 72-74 and the examination by Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity*, 122-148.

²⁰ Fazle Haqq Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā fi ibṭāl al-tughwā* (Lahore, 1979), 152 and 162: “rather, what this statement means is an individual that shares in the blessed essence and all of the properties of perfection belonging to the leader of all creation and most noble of all possible creatures (Allah bless him and grant him peace).”

بلکہ اس قائل کی مراد وہ فرد ہے جو اس ذات اقدس کے ساتھ ماہیت اور ان تمام اوصاف کاملہ میں شریک ہو جو اس ذات قدسی صفات سرور کائنات مقرر ممکنات صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وسلم میں موجود ہے

²¹ This detractor is considered to be none other than Khayrabadi who initially evinced stern opposition to the phraseology in Ismail Dihlawi’s *Taqwiyat-e imān*, because of its implying the possibility of creating an identical Muḥammad. Khayrabadi’s general objections are presented in section 2.

²² Ismail Dihlawi, *Yak roza* (Multan: Fārūqī Kutub Khāna, n.d.), 17:

قولہ - وہو محال لانه نقص والنقص عليه تعالى محال - اقول اگر مراد از محال ممنوع لذات است کہ تحت قدرت الہیہ داخل نیست پس لا نسلم کہ کذب مذکور محال معنی مسطور باشد چہ مقدمہ قضیہ غیر مطابقتہ مواقع والقتائے آن بر ملائکہ وانبیاء خارج از قدرت الہیہ نیست والا لازم آید کہ قدرت انسانی ازید از قدرت ربانی باشد چہ عقد قضیہ غیر مطابقتہ للواقع والقتائے آن بہ محالطین در قدرت اکثر افراد انسانی ست - کذب مذکور اسے منافی حکمت اوست پس ممنوع بالغیرست - وابدًا عدم کذب را اکمالات حضرت حق سبحانہ بی شمار ندانج

For Dihlawi, the act of putting together a statement contrary to reality and transmitting that to supernatural intermediaries like angels or human agents like Prophets and Messengers is not something intrinsically impossible because it is an act that a terrestrial agent like humans can actualise and therefore *a fortiori* God can actualise it. It is also not a logical contradiction to affirm such a proposition. What Dihlawi appears to be claiming is the following:

$$\diamond A(\theta, \varphi)$$

Read as: 'it is possible that God composes a statement contrary to fact.'

Although it is possible for God to do φ , it is never the case that He actualises φ . Hence,

$$\neg \forall w(A(\theta, \varphi, w))$$

Read as: 'there is no possible world in which God composes a statement contrary to fact.'²³

The crux of the contention is how Dihlawi makes the conjunction of $\langle \diamond A(\theta, \varphi) \rangle$ and $\langle \neg \forall w(A(\theta, \varphi, w)) \rangle$ compossible. Key to Dihlawi's solution is the modal concepts he utilises and they are: (a) the 'intrinsically impossible' (*mumtani' bi-l-dhāt*), also referred to as *essential* impossibility. This is a state of affairs that cannot ever be instantiated because it would entail an absurdity like a logical contradiction or something contrary to God's essence. For example, it cannot be the case that God actualise a proposition and its negation at the same time, i.e., $\langle \neg \diamond A(\theta, (p \wedge \neg p)) \rangle$, and neither is it possible for God to actualise a rival deity identical to Himself, i.e., $\langle \neg \diamond (G(x) \wedge C(x, y) \wedge G(y) \wedge (x=y)) \rangle$ or create His own attributes, $\langle \neg \diamond (G(x) \wedge \Pi(y, x) \wedge C(x, y)) \rangle$.²⁴ Dihlawi like Khayrabadi agrees on the theological principle that God's power does not connect to 'absurdities' or 'impossibilia' (*mustahilāt, mumtani'āt*) and this does not in any way imply 'inability' (*'ajz*) on God's part because they do not have any reality or literally 'thing-ness' (*shay'iyyat*) in the first place. However, Khayrabadi does differ with Dihlawi over what counts as absurd or impossible; a difference that is crucial to this debate as we shall see.²⁵ In any case, according to this principle of intrinsic impossibility, omnipotence would be defined as follows:

$$\square \forall \varphi (\diamond A(\theta, \varphi) \equiv (L(\varphi) \wedge E(\varphi, \theta)))$$

Read as: 'For any proposition, God can bring it about if and only if the proposition is consistent with the laws of logic and God's essence.'

This definition of omnipotence is assumed by Dihlawi and is one of the standard definitions in the Sunnī Islamic *kalām* theological literature.²⁶ (b) 'extrinsic impossibility' (*mumtani' bi-l-ghayr*), also

²³ The symbolisation key:

- A : is able to do
- θ : God
- φ : a statement contrary to fact

²⁴ The symbolisation key:

- $C(x, y)$: x creates y
- $G(x)$: x is God
- $\Pi(y, x)$: y is an attribute of x

²⁵ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 162-164 and *Imtinā'-e nazīr*, 50.

²⁶ See for instance Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī's (d. 1014/1605) explanation of this restrictive scope of omnipotence in his *Sharḥ fiqh al-akbar* (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-'Uthmāniyya, 1885), 81-82:

known as *non-essential* or *indirect* impossibility. This is a state of affairs that also cannot ever be instantiated but only *by virtue of some other fact or state of affairs*. The *mumtaniʿ bi-l-ghayr* modal category is equivalent to another one and that is (c) the ‘intrinsically possible’ (*mumkin bi-l-dhāt*). This is whatever is logically possible to enact. From this it would seem that according to Dihlawī the *mumtaniʿ bi-l-ghayr* and the *mumkin bi-l-dhāt* are modally equivalent. Thus, for Dihlawī, whatever is extrinsically impossible is something *per se* actualisable by God although it never is actualised by Him due to some self-imposed constraint or condition such as His will, or in this case, His wisdom. On this distinction between intrinsic impossibility and extrinsic possibility, Tareen aptly summarises Dihlawī’s core claim:

On the basis of this principle, he launched the case that since the absence and impossibility of Muḥammad’s replica were not essential but indirect, the presence of such a replica was essentially possible. And since God could obviously enact what was essentially possible, it was proved that God possessed the capacity to produce another Muḥammad, or, for that matter, to renege his own promise. That was all he had tried to say in Taqwīyat al-Īmān, Ismāʿīl pleaded, like an author battling to control the reception history of his own text.²⁷

Dihlawī furnished several supporting arguments to affirm it being both possible for God to create an identical Prophet Muḥammad and for Him to lie *in potentia*. Four salient supporting arguments will be examined and they are as follows: **Supporting Argument #1: God can create likenesses of all things.** This is the case, Dihlawī argues, based on ‘scriptural proof’ (*dalīl naqlī*) and ‘rational proof’ (*burhān ʿaqlī*).²⁸ The scriptural proof is that God has informed about His power to recreate the likenesses of all things on Resurrection Day, which is taken from “*Has He Who created the heavens and the earth no power to create the likes of them? Yes, indeed, He is the Superb Creator*”²⁹ and that He has the power to do anything, which is derived from “*to God you will return and He has power over all things.*”³⁰ Dihlawī writes:

Every human person can be resurrected in the hereafter and hence fall under the power of God according to the requirements of the verse. So it seems that the combination of the mentioned reasoning is that the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) can also be brought alive in the resurrection. Therefore, according to the verse, the existence of his likeness falls under the power of God; hence, the existence of the likeness of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) falls under the power of God and this is the whole point.³¹

Moreover, it has been said: every general expression is specified and His statement (Most High), “God has power over all things...” [al-Baqara/284] is specified by whatever He wills. This is in order to exclude [from this scope of God’s power] His essence, attributes, whatever He does not desire from His creation and impossibilities that occur in his creation. The point is that God’s power is connected to what His Will is connected to. Otherwise, it is not said that He is capable of the impossible because of their non-occurrence and the necessity of their falsehood nor is it said that He is incapable of doing it out of utmost respect to one’s Lord. Finally, this generality is specified with His statement (Most High), “And God knows all things...” [al-Baqara/282].

هذا و قد قيل: كل عام يخص لما خص قوله تعالى: (و الله على كل شيء قدير) مما شاء ليخرج ذاته و صفاته و ما لم يشأ من مخلوقاته وما يكون من الخيال وقوعه في كائناته . والحاصل أن كل شيء تعلقت به مشيئته فعلقت به قدرته. و إلا فلا يقال هو قادر على الخيال لعدم وقوعه و لزوم كذبه ولا يقال غير قادر عليه تعظيماً لأدبه من ربه. ثم هذا العام مخصوص بقوله تعالى: (والله بكل شيء عليم).

²⁷ Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity*, 101.

²⁸ Dihlawī, *Yak roza*, 2-4.

²⁹ Yā-Sin/81.

³⁰ Hūd/4.

³¹ Dihlawī, *Yak roza*, 3-4:

If God has the power to create the ‘likes of them’ (*an yakhlūqa mithlahum*) as mentioned in the Qur’ān Yā-Sīn/81, meaning the likeness of any created entity on Resurrection Day, and Prophet Muḥammad is among God’s created entities that will be resurrected, then it follows that God can create the likeness of him again. The metaphysical principle at play here is that whatever object is possible for God to create, its ‘likeness’ (*mithl*) is also possible for Him to create. It seems that Dihlawi is using the term *mithl* in the sense of a replica, i.e. *exact likeness*. Formally: $\square \forall y \diamond A(\theta, y) \rightarrow \diamond A(\theta, y^*)$, where ‘y*’ is the (exact) likeness or replica of y.³² Khayrabadi’s rebuts this exegesis offered by Dihlawi. According to him, the context of the verse is about God’s response to the obstinate Meccan unbelievers who denied the conceivability of a bodily resurrection, which was that if God indeed created vast objects like the heavens and the earth, then *a fortiori* it is an even easier matter that He bring back to life smaller objects like the very bones, bodies and organs of the dead.³³ For Khayrabadi, the phrase ‘the likes of them’ (*mithlahum*) refers to bringing back to life dead bodies in a resurrection and cannot be extended to mean creating another exact individual who possesses all the human perfections of the Prophet Muḥammad.³⁴

Supporting Argument #2: intrinsic vs. extrinsic impossibility. The rational proof Dihlawi presents in conjunction with the scriptural proof just outlined under supporting argument #1 is explained as follows:

*As for the rational proof, after its statement, the existence of the aforementioned example is extrinsically impossible, and everything that is extrinsically impossible is intrinsically possible, and whatever is intrinsically possible falls under divine power. Hence, the existence of the aforementioned example falls under the divine power, and that is my point.*³⁵

پس ضمیر جمع مکرر جامع است بر سوائے جمیع بنی آدم زیرا کہ یہ مذکورہ و مقام بیان معاد واقع گریوید پس ہر کہ در میاں زندہ خواهد شد آن داخل است در کتبہ کریمہ ظاہر است - ہر فردی از افراد انسانی در معاد زندہ شدنی است پس مثل او بہ مقتضائے کریمہ مذکورہ داخل تحت قدرت الہیہ باشد۔ پس گویا ترکیب دلیل مذکور باہی وجہ باشد کہ نبی صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم در معاد زندہ خواهد شد۔ پس وجود مثل او داخل است تحت قدرت الہیہ بمقتضائے کریمہ مذکورہ پس وجود مثل نبی صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم داخل باشد تحت قدرت الہیہ و ہو المطلوب

³² “According to [the meaning of] the Qur’an’s uttered speech, on the matter of being subservient to a form of power or of not being so, two like entities carry the same rule or principle”, Dihlawi, *Yak roza*, 4 (Translation from Tareen, *Defending Muḥammad in Modernity*, 100):

لأن حكم المثليين في الدخول تحت القدرة و عدمه بمنطوق القرآن

We see this principle mentioned by for example Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in *al-Iqtisād fī-l-ī‘tiqād* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2015), 52, “the power to do something entails the power over doing its likeness”:

فإن القدرة على الشيء قدرة على مثله

³³ ‘A fortiori’ is a Latin term that translates to ‘from the stronger.’ In Arabic it is referred to as ‘arguing from what is greater’ (*al-jadal bi-l-awlā*), or ‘by greater reasoning’ (*bāb awlā*). In reasoning and logic, an *a fortiori* argument is one that draws a stronger conclusion from an already accepted fact or proposition. See Rosalind W. Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’an: God’s Arguments* (New York, Routledge, 2004), 126-129 for Qur’ānic examples such as al-Ḥajj/73; al-Aḥqāf/33; Qāf/36-37 and al-Nāzi‘āt/27.

³⁴ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 171-173.

³⁵ Dihlawi, *Yak roza*, 5:

و اما برهان عقلی پس بیانش آنکہ وجود مثل مذکور ممتنع بالغیر است و ہر ممتنع بالغیر ممکن بالذات و ہر ممکن بالذات داخل تحت قدرت الہیہ پس وجود مثل مذکور داخل است تحت قدرت

الہیہ و ہو المطلوب

This supporting argument is based on a hypothetical syllogism but is here stated semi-formally in conditional form as follows:

- (1) If something is extrinsically impossible then it is intrinsically possible.
- (2) If something is intrinsically possible then it falls under the divine power to actualise.
- (3) Therefore, if something is extrinsically impossible then it falls under the divine power to actualise.
- (4) Creating an identical Prophet Muḥammad is extrinsically impossible.
- (5) Therefore, an identical Prophet Muḥammad is intrinsically possible.
- (6) Therefore, an identical Prophet Muḥammad falls under the divine power to actualise.

This argument chains together multiple premises to draw a conclusion. A formal presentation of this supporting argument is as follows:³⁶

1. $\forall x(E(x) \rightarrow I(x))$
2. $\forall x(I(x) \rightarrow D(x))$
3. $\forall x(E(x) \rightarrow D(x))$
4. $E(m)$
5. $I(m)$
6. $D(m)$

The argument reconstructed here is logically valid. From 1 & 4, we infer 5 via Modus Ponens.³⁷ Similarly, from 2 & 5 we infer 6 via Modus Ponens again. With the assumption of the modal distinction *mumtani' bi-l-dhāt* and *mumtani' bi-l-ghayr* already explained above, it would be inferable that God can produce another Prophet Muḥammad. Khayrabadi, as we will see in section 2, denies 3 & 4 holding in all cases and thus denies the logical equivalence between *mumtani' bi-l-ghayr* and *mumkin bi-l-dhāt*.

Supporting Argument #3: *God's scope of power must always exceed the scope of creaturely power.* If God is unable to lie and creatures like human beings are, then this implies God is unable to do something His created creatures can. This would imply He is not absolutely powerful. However, claiming that God is not absolutely powerful is a flaw and attributing a flaw to God is impossible and heretical.³⁸ For Dihlawi, attributing inability to God over something that is intrinsically

³⁶ The symbolisation key:

- $E(x)$: x is extrinsically impossible.
- $I(x)$: x is intrinsically possible.
- $D(x)$: x falls under the divine power to actualize.
- m : another (identical) Prophet Muḥammad.

³⁷ Al-Fārābī gives this example of modus ponens:

Thus the first mood of the connected hypothetical [syllogism] is [the following]: 'If this visible thing is a human, then it is an animal; but it is a human'. This produces the conclusion that 'It is therefore an animal'.

Reproduced from Chatti and Hodges, *al-Fārābī: Syllogism*, 134.

³⁸ Dihlawi, *Yak roza*, 17. This kind of argument echoes those of the Andalusian polymath Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1054) in his extensive discussion of miracles and divine power (*qudra*) in *al-Faṣl fī-l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-nihāl*, 2: 20-33. See as well the subsequent discussion on this topic in al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and Ibn Rushd's counter-refutation *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (Cambridge: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1954), 323-333, sec. 528-542.

possible to do like creating the exact likeness of an object or to generate untrue speech is to undermine God's essential attribute of omnipotence. For him, it is unwarranted to restrict the scope of divine omnipotence from the set of indeterminate 'possibilia' (*mumkināt*). As already mentioned above, only absurdities like logical contradictions and essential impossibilities are excluded from the scope of omnipotence. Khayrabadi's reply to Dihlawi's argument attempts to highlight problematic assumptions embedded in it. Khayrabadi states that there are two types of powers (1) 'perfect power' (*qudrat-e kāmila*), which is maximal power exclusive to God because it is one of His unique attributes and (2) 'imperfect power' (*qudrat-e nāqīṣa*), which is a limited power possessed by finite human creatures.³⁹ The latter category of power is vastly inferior and includes the capacity to do defective and improper acts like lying, cheating and oppressing. Hence, if defective and improper acts like lying are possible for human creatures but impossible for God, this does not make the scope of power of the former more than the scope of the latter, i.e., it does not necessitate that human beings are more powerful than God. For that to be possible, it would need to be shown how human power is inclusive of or consists of divine power. Therefore, Dihlawi would need to prove first how the former not surpasses but includes the latter, meaning how creaturely power consists of divine power and then compare both to see how it is that one is less than the other.⁴⁰

Supporting Argument #4: Potentiality vs. actuality. God has the potential to create any number of identical Prophet Muḥammads and to contravene or renege His 'threats' (*wa'īd*) to punish the iniquitous; but this does not mean He will actualise these states of affairs. Only God's act of actualising them would necessitate its falsity, not the *potential* to do so.⁴¹ Thus, for Dihlawi, there is a major difference between being able to do something (having the power to actualise it) and actually doing it. This allows Dihlawi to maintain the distinction between something being possible and it being actual, i.e., in reality. Thus, the possibility (*imkān*) of p , $\diamond p$ does not entail p , its occurrence (*wuqū'c*). Khayrabadi dismisses this argument in somewhat ad hominem fashion but also invokes species of arguments from appeal to absurdity and appeal to incredulity in that the belief that God could possibly lie is unbecoming a true believer even if He does not. In addition, Khayrabadi highlights the implication of Dihlawi's potentiality argument, namely that it would imply it being logically possible to impute an imperfection to God, which is equally absurd as actually imputing it to Him. All imperfections must be negated of God in absolute terms. It cannot even be something conceivable for Him.⁴²

2. The Objection Stated and Supported

In *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, Khayrabadi presents in summary form his objection to the possibility of God creating another person identical in 'perfection' (*kamālāt*) to the Prophet Muḥammad (*imkān-e*

³⁹ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 159-160.

⁴⁰ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 160-161 and *Imtinā'-e nazīr*, 119-123.

⁴¹ Dihlawi, *Yak roza*, 14:

توضیح مقام اینک و وقوع چیزے کہ مخالف چیز باشد مستلزم کذب آن چیز است . نہ امکان وقوع آن و مناط صحت تعلیق قدرت امکان مقدور است نہ وقوع آن -

⁴² Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 157-159.

naẓīr) because it entails God saying something false. I have translated the relevant passage from the Urdu and present it in full below:

According to logic, this syllogism (connected with categorical propositions)⁴³ takes the following form:

(1) For another to exist identical to the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) in perfection implies an intrinsic impossibility (muḥāl bi-l-dhāt).

(2) If something is intrinsically impossible, then it cannot be correctly linked to God's act of creating (according to the form of the conjunctive conditional syllogism).

If the possibility of creating another person identical to the Prophet Muḥammad (God bless him and grant him peace) in perfection could be correctly linked to God's act of creating, then it implies that God would be able to lie. However, the consequent (tālī) 'God is able to lie' is invalid and so the antecedent (muqaddim) 'the possibility of creating another person identical to the Prophet Muḥammad (God bless him and grant him peace) in perfection could be correctly linked to God's act of creating' will also be invalid.

For another to exist identical to the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) in perfection implies a lie on God's part. This is because there cannot be another individual identical to the honourable Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) and if another (new) Prophet was to come after him (God bless him and grant him peace) then it would entail that the clear text of the Qur'ān is false. The Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) is the seal of all the prophets and this is established by unequivocal Qur'ānic verses like God (Most High) declaring, "Muḥammad is not the father of any one of you but he is God's messenger and the seal of all the prophets" [al-Aḥzāb/40]. Therefore, if it is correct to say that creating another individual identical to the Prophet Muḥammad (God bless him and grant him peace) is indeed possible, then it implies that it is correct to say that this clear and unequivocal verse of the Qur'ān is false – and may God protect us from saying that!

Finally, the reason why it is intrinsically impossible for God to lie is because lying is an attribute of deficiency and imperfection and it is intrinsically impossible to ascribe attributes of deficiency and imperfection to God.⁴⁴

⁴³ On the 'categorical connected syllogism' (al-qiyās al-iqtirānī al-ḥamlī), see Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī, *Isagoge: A Classical Primer on Logic (Isāghūjī risāla fī-l-mantiq)*, trans. Feryal Salem (Chicago: Blue Mountain Press, 2022), 24 (Arabic text) with the translator's notes on 110-114.

⁴⁴ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 156:

(منطقی انداز میں) اس قیاس (اقتزائی حملی) کی ترتیب یوں ہوگی:

(1) کمالات میں حضور صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وسلم کے برابر کا موجود ہونا مجال بالذات کو مستلزم ہے۔

(2) اور جو مجال بالذات کو مستلزم ہو اس سے تکوین کا تعلق صحیح نہیں ہے یا (بصورت قیاس استثنائی اتصالی) کہا جائے۔

اگر کمالات میں حوصلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کے برابر سے تکوین کا تعلق صحیح ہوتا تو اللہ تعالیٰ کا کذب بھی صحیح ہوتا لیکن تالی (اللہ تعالیٰ کا کذب باطل ہے) لہذا مقدم (کمال میں حضور کے برابر سے تکوین کے تعلق کا صحیح ہونا) بھی باطل ہوگا۔ حضور صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وسلم کے برابر کا موجود ہونا ذنب الہی کو سلام ہے اس کا بیان یہ ہے کہ نبی اکرم صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وسلم کے برابر نبی کے سوا اور کوئی شخص نہیں ہو سکتا اور نور صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وسلم کے بعد اسے انہی کے موجود ہونے سے نص قرآنی کا کذب لازم آتا ہے، اسلئے نبی اکرم صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وسلم کا خاتم جمیع انبیاء ہونا نص قرآنی سے ثابت ہے، اللہ تعالیٰ فرماتا ہے:

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ

لہذا اگر حضور صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وسلم کے برابر کا تکوین کے تحت داخل ہونا تو صحیح ہو تو اس نص صریح کا کذب صحیح ہو جائے گا العیاذ باللہ تعالیٰ من ذلک۔ رہا یہ امر کہ اللہ تعالیٰ کا کذب مجال بالذات ہے تو اس کا بیان یہ ہے کہ کذب صفت نقص اور عیب ہے اور اللہ تعالیٰ کے صفات نقص و عیب سے منصف ہونا مجال بالذات ہے۔

In *Imtinā-e nazīr*, 401, Khayrabadi states his thesis tersely as follows:

Khayrabadi's argument is a compound one and a classic example of Modus Tollens. Modus Tollens is a valid rule of inference in classical logic and takes the form:

$$\begin{array}{l} P \rightarrow Q \\ \neg Q \\ \therefore \neg P \end{array}$$

If P , implies Q and Q is not the case, then it follows that P cannot be the case. If P were true, then Q would also have to be true (because $P \rightarrow Q$). But since Q is not true, P must not be true either.⁴⁵ In informal terms, Khayrabadi's argument is:

- (1) If the possibility of creating another person identical the Prophet Muḥammad in perfection could be correctly linked to God's act of creating then God is able to lie.
- (2) God is not able to lie.
- (3) Therefore, the possibility of creating another person identical to the Prophet Muḥammad (God bless him and grant him peace) in perfection cannot be correctly linked to God's act of creating.

In the remainder of the section, I will take up this version, explain it and unpack Khayrabadi's supporting arguments for each premise. Then, in the final section, there will be my concluding remarks on this debate on omnipotence.

I turn now to Khayrabadi's supporting arguments for his claim that it is intrinsically impossible for God to create an identical Prophet Muḥammad and for God to lie. These are quite extensive so I will only mention some pertinent ones. Let me first restate Khayrabadi's reconstructed argument:

- (1) If the possibility of creating another person identical to the Prophet Muḥammad in perfection could be correctly linked to God's act of creating then God is able to lie.
- (2) God is not able to lie.
- (3) Therefore, the possibility of creating another person identical to the Prophet Muḥammad (God bless him and grant him peace) in perfection cannot be correctly linked to God's act of creating.

"at this present time, my claim is the following: it is intrinsically impossible for there to be another person identical in perfection to the holy Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) and whatever is intrinsically impossible does not fall under divine power."

⁴⁵ حالاً دعوی می کنم که شخصی که برابر آن حضرت صلی الله تعالی علیه وسلم در کمالات باشد ممتنع بالذات است و هر چه ممتنع بالذات است تحت قدرت الهی داخل نیست
Al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) under the hypothetical syllogism gives this example:

"The second mood of the connected hypothetical [syllogism], in which the opposite of the consequent is detached, produces the opposite of the antecedent, as when we say 'If this visible thing is a human, then it is an animal; but it is not an animal'. This produces: 'it is therefore not a human'. But in this and similar cases, if we were to detach the opposite of the antecedent, or the unaltered consequent, then there would be no conclusion that this premise-pair necessarily produces."

Reproduced from Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Al-Fārābī, Syllogism: an Abridgement of Aristotle's Prior Analytics*, trans. Saloua Chatti and Wilfrid Hodges (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 134. See as well Saloua Chatti, *Arabic Logic From Al-Fārābī to Averroes: A Study of the Early Arabic Categorical, Modal, and Hypothetical Syllogistics* (Springer Verlag, 2019), 268.

Before presenting the supporting arguments, two phrases used in the reconstructed argument based on Khayrabadi's wording need explaining. The first phrase is 'creating another person identical to the Prophet Muḥammad in perfection'. This is Khayrabadi's definition of *imkān-e naẓīr*. In other words, God has the power to create another individual identical to Prophet Muḥammad in essence and unique properties exemplified by him and him alone. The second phrase 'correctly linked to God's act of creating' refers to the way *kalām* scholars describe the divine attribute of power connecting to its 'object' (*maqḍūr*) and this connection or 'nexus' (*ta'alluq*) can be correct and proper or incorrect and improper. It is correct when the object of power is something doable or actualisable (e.g., *possibilia*) and incorrect when the object of power is something undoable and unactualisable (e.g., *impossibilia*).⁴⁶

The Supporting Arguments for premise 1 include: **#1a:** *scripture cannot be made false*. Khayrabadi bluntly declares that affirming *imkān-e naẓīr* leads to causing the Qur'ān to state something false. Essentially, if the declaration in al-Aḥzāb/40 that 'Muḥammad is not the father of any one of you but he is God's messenger and the seal of all the prophets' is true, then *imkān-e naẓīr* would entail it is possibly false and it is inconceivable that the Qur'ān contain a possibly false statement let alone an actually false one. **#1b:** *God cannot do the impossible*. In agreement with Ismail Dihlawī, Khayrabadi upholds that impossibilities do not fall within the scope of divine power, but in disagreement with him, emphatically insists creating an identical Muhammad m^* is something intrinsically impossible based on two general arguments. **#1b1:** The first argument is that *imkān-e naẓīr* would imply creating the same essence of Prophet Muḥammad with all the exclusive properties of perfection attributed to him. The reasoning is based on Khayrabadi's division of 'properties' (*awṣāf*) into 'shareable' and 'non-shareable'. "Shareable properties are those that can be exemplified by more than one object" and non-shareable properties are "those that cannot be exemplified by more than one object".⁴⁷ Being a Prophet of God for example is a shareable property between many individuals (hence there are many prophets) but being the *final* prophet of God is a non-shareable property because there cannot be anyone else exemplifying it. Two properties among many are unique and exclusive to the Prophet Muḥammad and hence non-shareable. Suppose 'F' refers to Prophet Muḥammad's exclusive property of being the final Prophet and 'G' to refer to his exclusive property of being the great and global intercessor for humanity on the Day of Judgment. If we affirm *imkān-e naẓīr* then it would imply m^* would also possess these exclusive properties, $\diamond(Fm^* \wedge Gm^*)$. In other words, it would mean it is possible for another individual to be the final Prophet and possess the power of global intercession, $\diamond((Fm \wedge Gm) \wedge (Fm^* \wedge Gm^*))$. For Khayrabadi, this is contradictory because stating that Prophet Muḥammad is the final prophet of God and the only global intercessor on the Day of Judgment but another can also be

⁴⁶ Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 152-160. As a side note, Khayrabadi uses the Arabic word 'takwīn' when referring to God's act of creating. It is often translated as 'existentialisation' in order to distinguish it from 'creation'. There is a deep disagreement among Sunnī *kalām* theologians over whether *takwīn* is taken as a distinct attribute of God through which God's acts take place or whether it is understood as a functional aspect of His attribute of power (*qudra*). These nuanced differences have no substantive bearing on the argument as I have presented it because the focus is not on explaining *how* God creates an identical Prophet Muḥammad but whether it is logically possible to do so. For more on this topic of *takwīn*, refer to Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Maturīdī Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 175-190.

⁴⁷ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 174.

God's final Prophet and humanity's global intercessor is tantamount to denying Muḥammad's finality and exclusive intercessory status.⁴⁸

#1b2: The second argument is a strictly logical one and I will briefly mention two types. The first logical argument is based on the traditional *square of opposition*.⁴⁹ Khayrabadi presents his reasoning in this way. Take the universal negative proposition 'No possible entity at any time is identical to the Prophet Muḥammad' meaning in terms of his perfection) (No S is P = E). Assume the proposition to be true. The 'converse' (*al-ʿaks*) of No S is P would also be true, namely 'the Prophet Muḥammad is not identical to any possible entity at any time' (No P is S). This is because in medieval logic, following Aristotle, E and I propositions simply convert. However, as Khayrabadi notes, if 'No S is P' is false, i.e. it is not the case that no possible entity is identical to the Prophet Muḥammad, then its contradictory, an affirmative particular proposition, would be true, namely 'there is some possible entity at some time that is identical to the Prophet Muḥammad' (Some S are P = I) and this is clearly false as it would contravene clear Islamic doctrines regarding the nature and status of the Prophet, like the ones already mentioned by Khayrabadi. Hence, he concludes, "when the original proposition [No S is P] is true, its conversion is undoubtedly true. Therefore, it is demonstrated that there cannot be any possible entity identical to the Prophet Muḥammad in perfection".⁵⁰ In other words, the logical impossibility of an identical Muḥammad must mean it is intrinsically impossible and hence not possible to actualise.⁵¹

The second logical argument Khayrabadi presents is a *reductio ad absurdum* in order to show how the assumption of *imkān-e nazīr* leads to a contradiction. Semi-formally, the argument is as follows:⁵²

1. Assume: it is possible that m^* is identical with m .
2. Assume: Leibniz's Law of Identity of Indiscernibles (LII) - If two entities have all their properties in common, they are identical.
3. If it is possible that m^* is identical with m , then both are God's final Prophets.
4. It is not possible that both are God's final Prophet.
5. Therefore, it is not possible that m^* is identical with m .

Formally:

1. $\Diamond m^* = m$

⁴⁸ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 174-175.

⁴⁹ On a detailed analysis of the square of opposition in Arabic logic, refer to Chatti, "Logical Oppositions in Arabic Logic: Avicenna and Averroes", *Around and Beyond the Square of Opposition*, ed. J.-Y. Beziau and Dale Jacquette. (Basel: Springer Verlag, 2012), 21-40 and idem, *Arabic Logic from al-Fārābī to Averroes*, 25-62. See as well al-Abharī, *Īsāghūjī*, 23 (Arabic text) with the translator's explanatory notes on 73-80.

⁵⁰ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 164-165.

⁵¹ See Khayrabadi's presentation of the argument in Arabic with a long explanation and discussion in *Imtīnā-e nazīr*, 131-147.

⁵² The symbolisation key:

- m : Prophet Muḥammad.
- m^* : a second Prophet Muḥammad that shares in his essence and qualities of perfection.
- F : the property of being God's only final prophet and messenger (one of the unique qualities).

2. $\forall \Phi(\Phi x \leftrightarrow \Phi y) \rightarrow x=y$ (LII)
3. $\Diamond m^* = m \rightarrow (Fm^* \wedge Fm)$
4. $\neg \Diamond(Fm^* \wedge Fm)$
5. $\therefore \neg \Diamond m^* = m$ (MT)

The argument as reconstructed is deductively valid and uses modus tollens in its final step. Here, the possibility in the assumption (premise 1) is whether it is possible for God to bring about another individual who is identical in essence and qualities of perfection to the actual Prophet Muḥammad, $\Diamond A(\theta, m^* = m)$. The conditional statement is premise 3, and its consequent is negated in premise 4, leading to the negation of the antecedent (the initial assumption) in the conclusion. However, the key to Khayrabadi's reductio argument is the theological premise about the uniqueness of the property of being the final Prophet of God (premise 4). By asserting that it is not possible for there to be two final Prophets, he effectively negates the possibility of m^* being identical to m , given that such an identity would require them to share all properties, including being the final Prophet of God. For Khayrabadi, as already discussed above, the property of being the final prophet of God is a non-shareable property. In addition, he rejects the assumption on scriptural basis because for him, it would make the verse in al-Aḥzāb/40 false, which is impossible. Hence, it is possible for God to bring about another individual who is identical in essence and qualities of perfection to the actual Prophet Muḥammad, $\neg \Diamond A(\theta, m^* = m)$.⁵³

Supporting Argument for premise 2: *imperfections are impossible for God*. Khayrabadi's argument that God cannot lie can be semi-formally stated:

- (1) Whatever is an imperfection cannot be attributed to God.
- (2) Lying is an imperfection.
- (3) Therefore, lying cannot be attributed to God.

He finds it incredulous that Ismail Dihlawi explicitly rejects imperfections and flaws to God like lying and yet entertains the possibility of attributing such to Him.⁵⁴ God's nature is 'holy' (*pāk*) and pure and attributing the possibility of lying cannot in any conceivable way be compatible with that holiness and purity. In addition, lying can never be considered a 'praiseworthy quality' (*ṣifāt-e madh*) by which to identify and define someone and hence all the more unworthy of characterising and positively identifying God with.⁵⁵ In other words, if any property F is a deficiency when possessed by human creatures then F cannot be a property of perfection when possessed by God. Finally, elevation of God above any creaturely resemblance or imperfection is not a limitation or weakness but a "proper and perfect exaltation and hallowing of God" (*yahi kamāl-e tanzīh aur taqdīs hai*).⁵⁶

Khayrabadi's conclusion that it is intrinsically impossible (*mumtani' bi-l-dhāt*) that God create another Muḥammad may seem problematic as it appears to imply that the Prophet Muḥammad is a necessary being or 'essentially exists' (*wājib bi-l-dhāt*), i.e., he cannot fail to exist; but the

⁵³ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 162-163.

⁵⁴ Dihlawi, *Yak roza*, 12 and Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 158.

⁵⁵ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 160-161.

⁵⁶ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 161.

Prophet clearly cannot be such a being as that would infringe on God's aseity because He alone is the necessary being and exists self-sufficiently. Hence, *imkān-e naẓīr* is necessary to affirm in order to avoid this unwarranted implication infringing aseity.⁵⁷ Khayrabadi's reply is that something being intrinsically impossible does not entail that it exists necessarily. In other words, the category *mumtani' bi-l-dhāt* simply means the non-existence of something is necessary, i.e., there is no possible way it can be the case. It is a negation and not an affirmation of something particular being necessary. Khayrabadi explains:

Also, to be unique and unparalleled in perfection does not refer to necessary existence because the quality (khāṣṣa) of necessary existence is that participation in its reality is inconceivable (ḥaqīqat mein shirkat mutaṣawwar na ho). This is because the reality of necessary existence just is the fact that its essence is not-shareable.⁵⁸

To conclude this section, the evident strategy Khayrabadi adopts against Ismail Dihlawi is to diffuse the logical force of his statements. This is why he elaborates at length on the logical implications. The aim of this strategy is simple. If it can be shown how it is logically impossible for God to create an identical Prophet Muhammad or to say untruths, there is no omnipotence problem because divine power does not connect to logical impossibilities; they are not included within the range of the proper objects of power (*al-maqdūrāt*). Therefore, making it a logical impossibility is to reduce it to a non-problem.

Conclusion

This controversy over divine omnipotence is grounded in two different religious sensibilities, orientations and intellectual outlooks. On the one hand, Dihlawi cannot compromise God's sovereignty and rightfulness to be the object of total religious worship and that involves upholding God's inclusive and comprehensive power. On the other hand, for Khayrabadi, there is an extreme danger in what he sees as Dihlawi's fanatical endeavour of vindicating a kind of transcendence of God that results in diminishing God's holiness and perfection and, more importantly, diminishing the status of God's most beloved creation, the Prophet Muḥammad. These two sensibilities and attitudes broadly took on an entirely protracted trajectory beyond both Ismail Dihlawi and Khayrabadi among Indian scholars that involved additional theological assumptions, deep philosophical analysis and reciprocal accusations of heresy between proponents and opponents of both scholars. The nuances of such discussions will not be mentioned here as much of it will be treated extensively in another forthcoming paper that examines specifically the topic of whether lying falls within God's power from the two-volume work *Juhd al-Muqill fi Tanzīh al-Mu'izz al-Mudhill* authored by Mahmud Hasan of Deoband (d. 1920). For this conclusion, I simply want to highlight one important consideration at play in this controversy regarding divine omnipotence. For Ismail Dihlawi, God is sovereign and with that

⁵⁷ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 175.

⁵⁸ Khayrabadi, *Tahqīq-e fatwā*, 175:

نیز کمالات میں لے نظیر و لے مثال ہونا وجوب ذاتی کا نام نہیں ہے، وجوب ذاتی کا خاصہ یہ ہے کہ حقیقت میں شرکت متصور نہ ہو کیونکہ وجوب ذاتی کا مصداق حقیقت احد یہ بیطلہ پلا تہا متشخص ہے جو قابل اشتراک ہی نہیں ہے۔

comes absolute power; but this power is nevertheless constrained by wisdom (*ḥikma*). The constraint can be stated as,

$$\diamond A(\theta, \varphi) \equiv W(\varphi, \theta)$$

Read as: 'God can bring about some proposition if and only if it is consistent with His wisdom.'

Thus, while something might be intrinsically possible (i.e., there is nothing logically contradictory about it), God's wisdom could dictate that He will never actualise or perform it. Thus, due to God's wisdom, certain intrinsically possible acts or states of affairs become impossible for Him to actualise. It is highly interesting that Dihlawi insists on the sovereignty of divine omnipotence (which is a major cause of this entire controversy), yet it is subordinate to wisdom. It is also interesting how this wisdom constraint on omnipotence is entirely ignored by Khayrabadi in his counterarguments. His focus is more on the logical and scriptural weakness, as he understands it, inherent in Dihlawi's arguments. This attribute of wisdom in this debate though raises some questions. First, in what sense can Dihlawi's exaltation of God through an adamant insistence of His all-inclusive power be maintained if that power can never properly be executed because it is guided (checked?) by wisdom. It seems that what is being implied is the following: 'God can bring about x (creating an identical Prophet Muḥammad or lying) but He can never bring about x due to His wisdom'. No explanation is given as to why this constraint is something either rational or scriptural. In addition, how would this wisdom constraint make omnipotence meaningful for exalting God. It suggests that Dihlawi's entire thesis pivots on a technical matter that may appear ultimately theoretically redundant in that it does not allow any substantive merit over Khayrabadi's flat and outright rejection of God creating an identical Prophet Muḥammad or lying as intrinsically impossible acts. Both agree on the conclusion that an identical Prophet Muḥammad will never occur nor will an act of divine deception like lying. Second, what proof, if any, would Dihlawi need to offer in order to demonstrate that divine wisdom constrains divine power from ever actualising another identical Prophet Muḥammad or a string of words that mean something contrary to reality or what is true? This is especially the case when God's consummate wisdom and its workings in things is ultimately inscrutable. For example, what exactly is the reason, or what is most likely the reason, for God not actually producing a false statement? Dihlawi does not suggest any possible reason and neither does Khayrabadi press him on giving one. Finally, if divine wisdom is the grounds for the impossibility for both actualising another identical Prophet Muḥammad or lying, then to what extent is this controversy strictly a *logical* one? Is it perhaps more about God's wisdom than about what the logical limits of His power are. Although I do not fully share this last worry, I'm aware that such a question could arise. However, this controversy was explicitly conceived by both scholars through an interrelation of scripture, hermeneutics and logic that the contours of that was examined in the article.

I'm inclined to think that if wisdom is a distinct divine attribute, then a systematic and logical presentation of it ought to be possible in the way other attributes are. How that logical exposition will look is something yet to be proposed but one tentative illustration in that direction at this preliminary stage can be made for our topic at hand. Whether it can be attributed to Dihlawi (or indeed Khayrabadi) is another matter. In any case, I'm tentatively proposing something I'll call

the ‘wisdom closure principle’. This closure principle would emphasise that if certain things are deemed impossible due to divine wisdom, then their entailments (whatever they are derived to be) are also impossible due to the same wisdom. Similarly, if certain things are possible due to divine wisdom, then their entailments are also possible. Let me formalise this wisdom closure principle:

- θ : God
- p, q : Propositions.
- W_θ : Divine wisdom.

The closure principle can be represented by the following two aspects:

- 1) Implication for Exclusion:

$$\neg \Diamond W_\theta(p) \wedge (p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow \neg \Diamond W_\theta(q)$$

Read as: if p is not possible due to divine wisdom and p logically implies (entails) q , then q is also not possible due to divine wisdom.

- 2) Implication for Inclusion:

$$\Diamond W_\theta(p) \wedge (p \rightarrow q) \rightarrow \Diamond W_\theta(q)$$

Read as: if p is possible due to divine wisdom and p logically implies (entails) q , then q is also possible due to divine wisdom.

So, in essence, the wisdom closure principle based on divine wisdom ensures that logical entailments respect the dictates of divine wisdom. Anything ruled out or in by divine wisdom will have its logical entailments similarly ruled out (or in). Hence, in both cases under examination in this essay, namely, of God creating an identical Prophet Muhammad or lying, we would be using the closure principle based on divine wisdom to determine the logical implications of both actions (within God’s power) being ruled out due to God’s wisdom.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the team at Kader for their assistance in seeing through the article to publication. I would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their gracious and meticulous comments that have helped greatly improve the accuracy and readability of the article.

Appendix

Abbreviation of Logical Symbols

\neg	Negation
\wedge	Conjunction
\vee	Disjunction
\rightarrow	Conditional
\equiv	If and only if

∀	All
∃	Some
◇	Possible
□	Impossible

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